Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

April 5, 1999

3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
    Fisheries Division
    Endangered Species Coordinator
    Nongame Coordinator
    Missoula Office
Montana State Library
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
North Powell Conservation Service
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
Montana State Library, Helena
Montana Department of Transportation, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Stan Bradshaw, Big Blackfoot Chapter of TU, P.O. Box 1273 Helena, MT 59624

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment for a stream restoration project that will restore fish habitat in a 3,000 foot section of McCabe Creek located near the town of Ovando.

Please submit any comment that you have by 5 p.m., May 5, 1999 to the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Missoula at the address listed above. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (406)542-5532.

Sincerely,

Ron Pierce
Fisheries Division

Powell

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
McCabe Creek Fish Habitat Restoration Project

General Purpose: This proposed project will improve fish habitat by adding wood and restoring pool habitat to 3,000 feet of stream channel on McCabe Creek, a tributary in the Monture Creek watershed located near the town of Ovando. The project will supplement additional planned restoration efforts, located immediately up- and downstream of the project area including: upgrading irrigation ditches in order to reduce fish losses to irrigation ditches; improving fish passage at road crossings and irrigation diversions; riparian livestock management changes to improve riparian health; and shrub and tree plantings in damaged riparian areas.

Location of Project:
This project will be conducted on McCabe Creek within Township 15 North, Range 12 West, Section 5 and 8 in Powell County.

II. Need for the Project:

This is a cooperative multi-agency private-lands effort that will restore habitat to the benefit of westslope cutthroat trout and potentially bull trout. The project will be undertaken on the Two Creeks Ranch near Ovando. Agencies and conservation groups participating in this effort include the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), and the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

McCabe Creek is a small impaired tributary to Dick Creek and the site of several planned native fish restoration activities. This stream supports westslope cutthroat, low numbers of brook trout and historically supported bull trout. The McCabe Creek fishery is negatively affected by riparian livestock overuse, loss of woody riparian species, dewatering, losses of fish to irrigation ditches and barriers to fish movement. McCabe Creek is located in a "core" area bull trout recovery watershed. Despite the degraded condition of the channel in the project area, the fundamental conditions exist for McCabe Creek to provide for high quality habitat for fish. These conditions are a gravel channel bottom, perennial streamflow, and cold water temperatures.

The project would restore habitat complexity by including woody stems (log veins and root wads) in such an array as to provide cover and structure for pool development (plunge pools, scour holes) and maintenance. Habitat structures will added at a mean interval of 80-85 feet and will provide hydraulic and habitat function and will be consistent with methods used for Rosgen (1996) B3 and C3 channel types. The project will result in approximately 40 new pools in the project area.

This project will restore health of riparian and aquatic habitats and directly benefit fish populations and riparian-dependent wildlife species. This project will improve habitat conditions for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Bull trout is a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act, and westslope cutthroat trout a "species of special concern" in Montana.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project calls for habitat restoration on approximately 3,000 feet of stream, and would include adding woody stems and restoring complex pool habitat consistent with a B3 and C3 Rosgen (1996) channel type. The restored channel would provide holding water and cover for juvenile and adult trout. Additional improvements would include the placement of wood (rootwads, wood veins, footer logs) for bank stability and cover, trans-planting willow and other shrubs within the riparian zone. Necessary livestock management changes will be implemented in the project area.

IV Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment:

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats

Adding pool complexity and reducing perturbations of livestock grazing within the riparian zone is expected to create a more diverse and healthy habitat for aquatic life. Expected improvements in aquatic habitat should enhance resident westslope cutthroat trout populations, increase the recruitment of cutthroat trout to Monture Creek and serve as thermal refuge for Blackfoot River native fish. Riparian dependent wildlife would also be improved through the restoration of the riparian vegetative community.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. Sediment filter mats will be placed on the downstream portion of the project to filter coarse (sand) particles from the stream. Permits obtained for this project will include 1) a 303a short term exemption from turbidity will be obtained from the Water Quality Bureau, 2) a 124 permit will be obtained from Fish Wildlife and Parks, and 3) a 404 permit obtained from the Army Corps of Engineers. The project includes removing the perturbations of livestock grazing from within the riparian zone and restoring the riparian vegetative community would reduce the sediment contribution to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture

No effects on geology and soils are expected above the high water mark. Below the high water mark, the project is expected to create a more stable stream channel.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality

Riparian vegetation and cover would be improved by stabilizing the stream channel and by extensive revegetation efforts through planting of native trees, shrubs and grasses. It is anticipated that such woody species of shrubs and trees such as various willow species, alders, cottonwoods and red-osier dogwood.

5. Aesthetics

Restoring McCabe Creek to a healthy and more natural stream environment would enhance aesthetics. The stream reach would be restored by using channel dimensions similar to those obtained from an undisturbed reach of stream and by re-establishing a healthy riparian vegetative community.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources

Bull trout a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act and westslope cutthroat trout an "species of special concern" in Montana both inhabit Monture Creek Watershed. We anticipate no direct short or long-term impacts to these species resulting from the project but rather direct long-term benefits resulting from the project. For bull trout Section 6 ESA consultation will occur however prior to the project. The benefits include restoring potential spawning and rearing areas, and restoring thermal refuge for both species.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers (COE) 404 permit. Therefore, an archaeologist from the U. S. Forest Service will survey the project area and ensure compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment:

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities

It is anticipated that restoration of this reach of McCabe Creek would improve spawning and rearing habitat and, as a result, would provide greater recruitment to Monture Creek and the Blackfoot River.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives:

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, fish densities in the project reach will remain low and recruitment to the Monture Creek will remain limited. In addition, habitat for riparian dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition due to overgrazing by livestock along the stream corridor. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to remove perturbations resulting from channel instability, livestock grazing and irrigation impacts within the riparian zone. These activities would restore the riparian vegetative community and create more diverse habitat for aquatic life and riparian dependent wildlife. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, improve aesthetics, improve water quality, and increase recruitment of salmonids to Monture Creek and the Blackfoot River.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section:

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. **Level of public involvement**

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public agencies including the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on the Montana Electronic Bulletin Board.

3. **Duration of comment period?** 30 Days

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on May 5, 1999.

4. **Persons responsible for preparing the EA document.**

Ron Pierce
Fisheries Division
Headquarters Region 2 - Missoula Office
Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

(406) 542-5532

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5532

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title: McCabe Creek Fish Habitat Restoration Project

Division/Bureau: Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Description of Project: The project is being proposed to restore fish habitat on a 3,000 foot of McCabe Creek, near the town of Ovando.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have

overlapping jurisdiction: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corp of Engineers, Department of Environmental Quality

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service,

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS: No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Ron Pierce of FWP

Date: April 5, 1999